Assessment literacy in practice

Anthony Green

University of Bedfordshire

Centre for English Language Learning and Assessment

Assessment literacy in practice

- Need for assessment literacy – users, assessors, constructors

- Do language teachers lack assessment literacy?

- What is assessment literacy for language teachers? Is it the same as assessment literacy for testers?

- Towards a shared framework for assessment literacy

Expanding definitions of literacy

1. Multiple literacies: different forms of communication require different ways of 'reading' - media literacy, digital literacy, statistical literacy. Awareness of divergent attitudes and social identities: cultural literacy.

2. Critical literacy: not only recovering informational content, but reflecting on, challenging and questioning the purpose of the information received.

The changing landscape of language assessment

- Growth of language testing and assessment worldwide.

- Globalised access to higher education, migration, employment.

- Learning outcomes and tests for accountability in education and training.

- Lifelong learning and 'portability' of qualifications.

- National and international standards and frameworks.

Stakeholders

Language assessment use by…

- policymakers

- government agencies and bureaucrats

- educationalists, employers

- media and general public

- test takers

- teachers and teacher educators

How much/ what kind of assessment literacy do teachers need?

Do language teachers really lack assessment literacy?

What do *users* need to know?
(Pill and Harding 2013)

What a language proficiency test looks like and what it aims to measure

- constructs that tests assess
- differences between testing instruments

Bodies responsible for overseeing testing procedures

How to find publicly available documentation on language tests and what to look for in it

- how tests are administered and scored
- how cut scores are determined and who determines them

A lack of LAC from the invisible profession?

Evidence for an assessment literacy deficit among language teachers

- Anecdotal evidence

A 'typical' teacher reaction to a Masters course in Language Assessment.:

"Why wasn't there a full course on assessment during my initial [teaching] degree? I've needed to know these things for years now"

Cumming (2009)

Evidence for an assessment literacy deficit among language teachers

- Tests of assessment literacy

  - Plake & Impara 1993, Newfields 2006, Kaftandijeva 2008 …

- Observation and surveys of teacher practices

  - Rea Dickins 2001, Coniam 2009, Goto Butler 2009…

- Surveys of provision and needs

  - Hasselgreen, Carlsen and Helness 2004, Brown and Bailey 2007, Tsagari 2008, Fulcher 2011…

True/False assessment literacy test
(Kaftandijeva 2008)

10. A test score at the 61st percentile indicates that 61% of the items have been answered correctly.

11. It is difficult to obtain reliable scores from a group in which the range of abilities is very wide.

12. A test score never equals a student's true level of ability or achievement.

13. A valid assessment instrument can be used with any group of students.

14. If test-retest reliability is .95, then if an examinee retakes the test, there is a 95% chance to get the same test score.

15. Systematic error usually leads to bias in assessment.

Training for language teachers
(Brown and Bailey 2008)

Topics covered in most graduate language assessment courses (by LT specialist instructors):

- Test Critiquing and Test Analysis

- Item Writing for Different Skills, Item Content Analysis, Item Quality Analysis, Item Facility, and Item Discrimination

- Construct Validity, and Criterion-related Validity

- Sources of Testing Error, Reliability and Test Length Strategies for Estimating Test Reliability: Test-retest Reliability, Parallel Forms Reliability, Internal Consistency Reliability, Standard Error of Measurement, and Interrater and Intrarater Reliability

Training for language teachers
(Jeong 2013)

"Non-LT" instructor of a language testing course suggested that 'language assessment course textbooks were targeted for large-scale assessment usage, so the content covered in these books was not directly related to language teachers' needs'.

Significant differences in content of courses depending on instructors' background:

+ LT: test specifications, test theory, basic statistics.

- LT: classroom assessment, rubric development, and test accommodations.

Training for language teachers
(Jeong 2013)

'It is important for LTs to preserve their specialty, but also it is essential to share the knowledge and make it accessible to those who are part of the language assessment culture. It is the role of the LT community to make the field approachable to others'

Assessment literacy for teachers ≠ statistical literacy
(Brindley 2001)

'Since most teachers are not engaged in the construction of formal tests, there are strong arguments for placing the emphasis in professional development. – at least initially – on the role of assessment in the learning process rather than on theoretical and statistical issues in testing'

Criticism of current training in language assessment (Taylor 2009)

Too little attention in teacher training

Language education programs at graduate level typically devote little time or attention to assessment theory and practice, perhaps just a short (often optional) module

Specialist training too narrow

… not simply to train well-qualified engineers and technicians for quality test development, but to educate and build a much broader and inclusive… community… concerned with the impact of testing on society and with fairness issues in the broadest sense.

National (USA) Survey of Teacher Assessment Literacy
(Plake & Impara.1993)

The American Federation of Teachers, the National Council on Measurement in Education, and the National Education Association (1990) seven standards for teacher development in the area of assessment:

1. Teachers should be skilled in choosing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.

2. Teachers should be skilled in developing assessment methods appropriate for instructional decisions.

3. Teachers should be skilled in administering, scoring, and interpreting the results of both externally produced and teacher produced assessment methods.

National (USA) Survey of Teacher Assessment Literacy
(Plake & Impara.1993)

4. Teachers should be skilled in using assessment results when making decisions about individual students, planning teaching, developing curriculum, and improving schools.

5. Teachers should be skilled in developing valid pupil grading procedures which use pupil assessment.

6. Teachers should be skilled in communicating assessment results to students, parents, other lay audiences, and other educators.

7. Teachers should be skilled in recognizing unethical, illegal, and otherwise inappropriate assessment methods and uses of assessment information.

University of Bedfordshire

Item 3. *Choosing Assessment Methods*

Mrs. Bruce wished to assess her students' understanding of the method of problem solving she had been teaching. Which assessment strategy below would be most valid?

a) Select a textbook that has a "teacher's guide" with a test developed by the authors.

b) Develop an assessment consistent with an outline of what she has actually taught in the class.

c) Select a standard test that provides a score on problem solving skills.

d) Select an instrument that measures students' attitudes about problem solving strategies

Item 23. *Using Assessments in Grading*

When a parent asks a teacher to explain the basis for his or her child's grade, the teacher should:

a) explain that the grades are assigned fairly, based on the student's performance and other related factors.

b) ask the parents what they think should be the basis for the child's grade.

c) explain exactly how the grade was determined and show the parent samples of the student's work.

d) indicate that the grading scale is imposed by the school board and the teachers have no control over grades.

National (USA) Survey of Teacher Assessment Literacy

(Plake & Impara.1993)
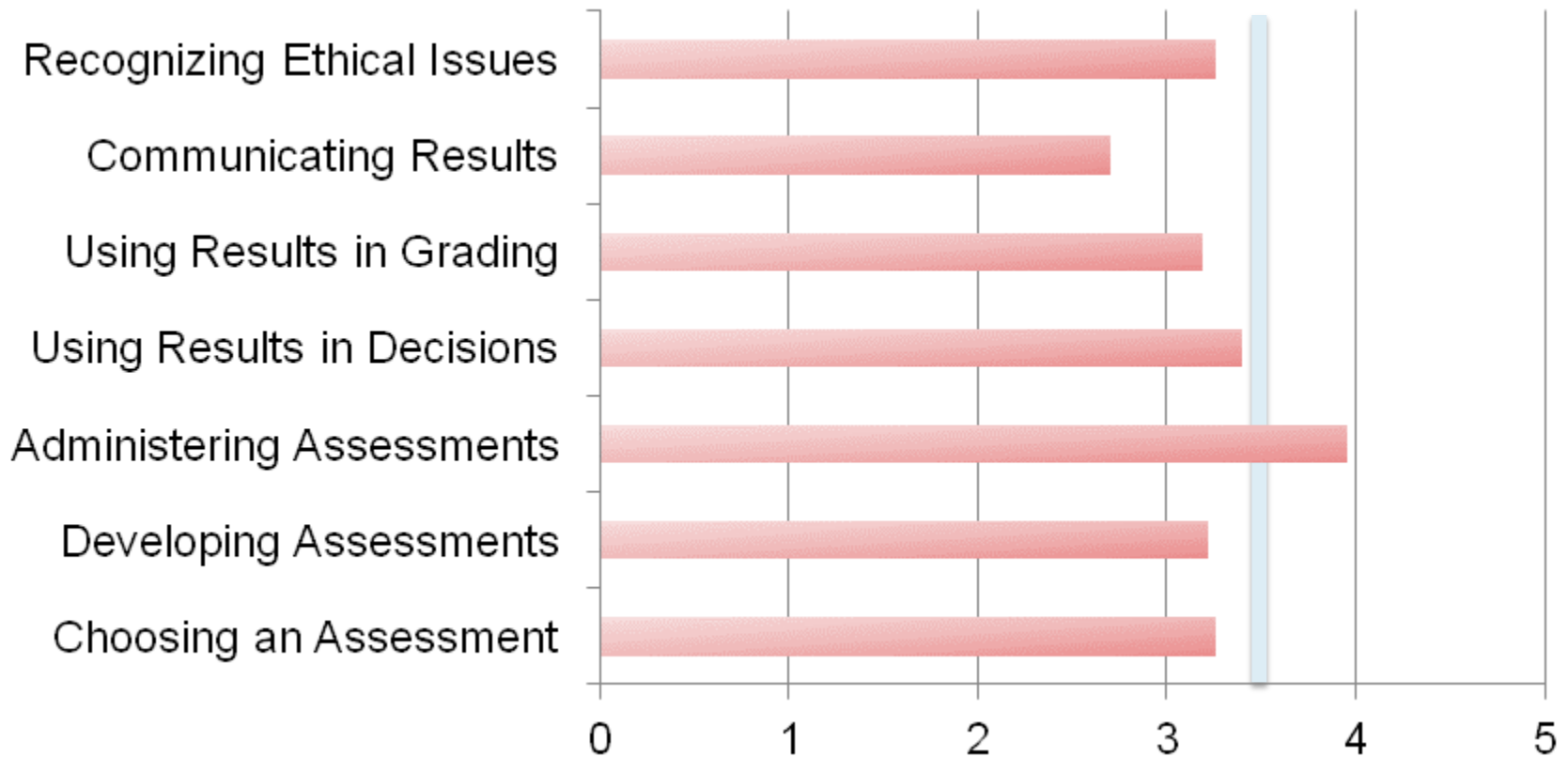
Accurate assessment: Effectively used

(Stiggins et al. 2004)

Key 1: Clear Purpose
- Who will use the results? What will they use the results for?

Key 2: Clear Targets
- What are the learning targets? Are they clear? Are they appropriate?

Key 3: Sound Design
- Method. Quality of items. Sampling of content. Avoidance of bias.

Key 4: Effective Communication
- Managing and reporting information. Who needs to know what?

Key 5: Student Involvement
- Students need to understand targets. Students can become effective self and peer assessors

Evidence from observation and surveys of practice

- Teachers often skilled in assessing students, but may be marginalised - perceive need for more training in LTA
- A lot of class time (25% or more) may be devoted to assessment
- Teacher-made assessments often of poor quality and not subject to any appraisal or review
  - Heavily reliant on printed sources, not always linked to what is taught
  - Not generally shared with other teachers
  - Most often focussed on grammar and vocabulary
- Teacher criteria often idiosyncratic, may not reflect mandated targets
- Feel pressured into mechanistic test preparation practices

Evidence from surveys of provision and needs
(Hasselgreen, Carlsen and Helness 2004)
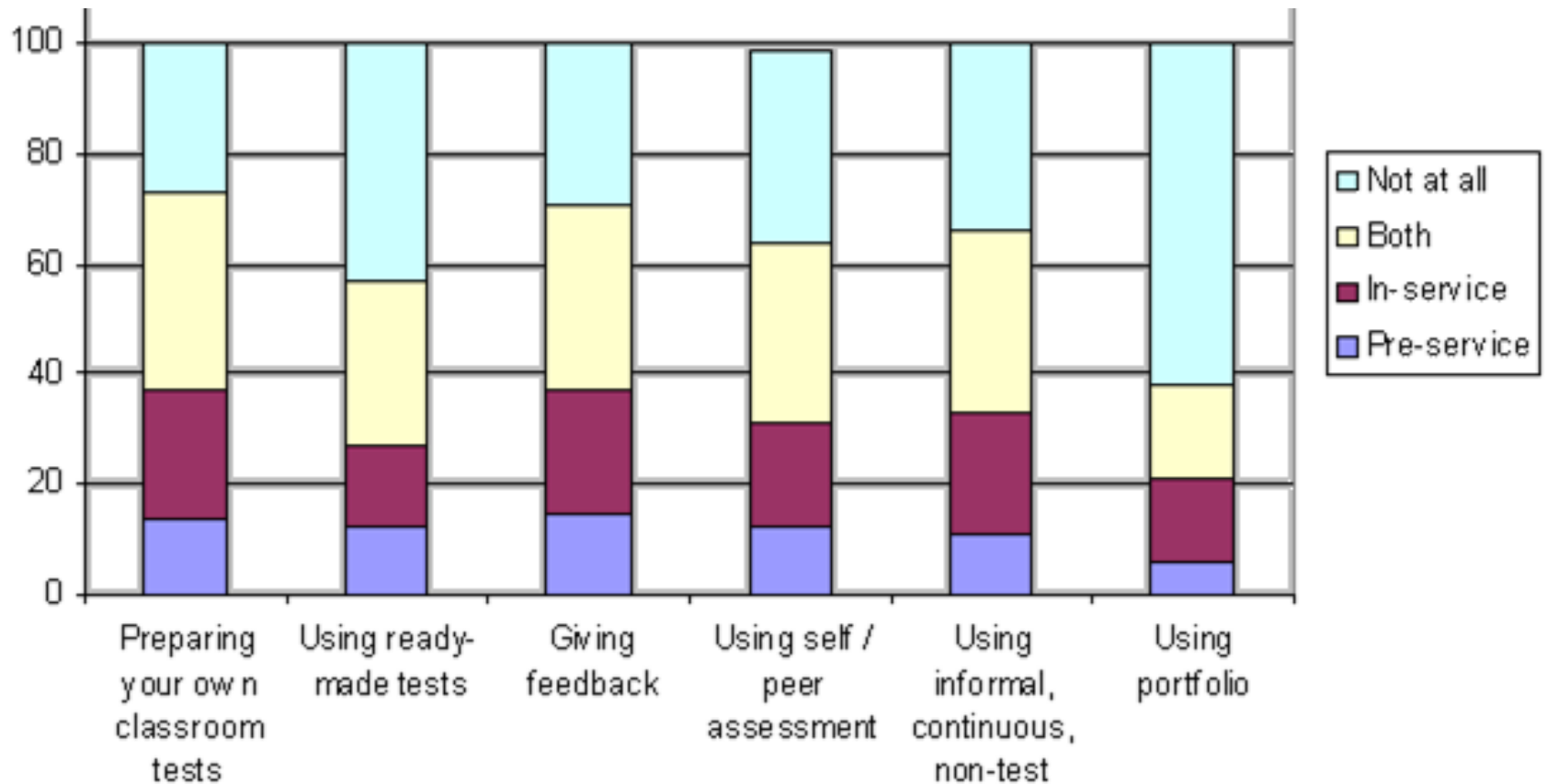
Assessment literacy needs of stakeholder groups
(Taylor 2013)

- Knowledge of theory

- Technical skills

- Principles and concepts

- Language pedagogy

- Sociocultural values

- Local practices

- Personal beliefs/ attitudes

- Scores and decision making

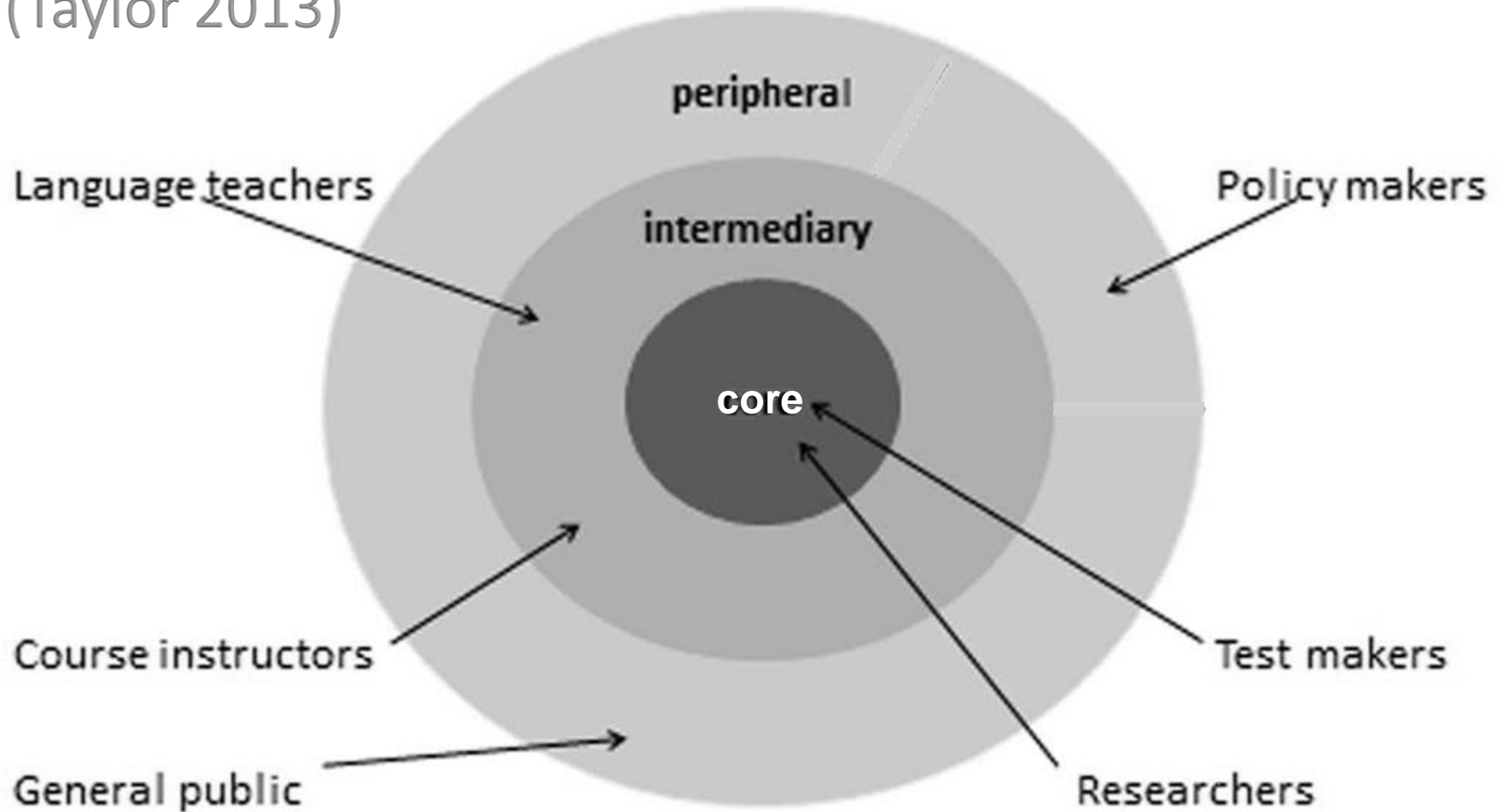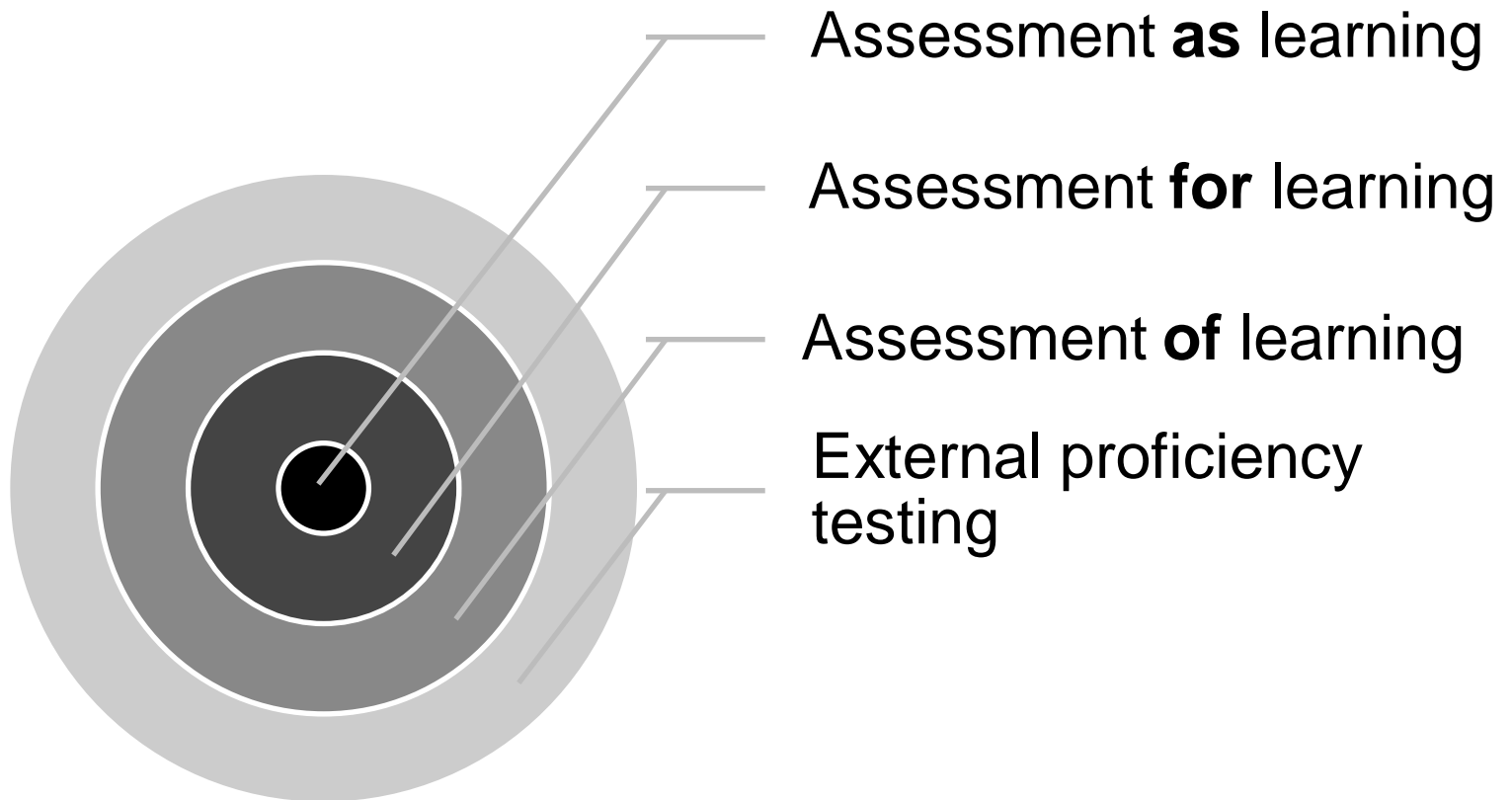# Assessment literacy needs of stakeholder groups
(Taylor 2013)

Teachers

Testers

Assessment literacy needs of stakeholder groups
(Taylor 2013)

Core and periphery in classroom language learning

Assessment **as** learning

Assessment **for** learning

Assessment **of** learning

External proficiency testing

Literacy in classroom assessment
(Hasselgreen.2008)

- **Assessment as learning**

 Teachers need to provide means, training and opportunities for self and peer assessment…

- **Assessment for learning**

  Teachers need awareness of learning processes and trajectories, sources of difficulty, strategies for overcoming roadblocks, effective delivery of feedback…

- **Assessment of learning**

  Teachers need skills in summarising learning, selecting methods, task design…

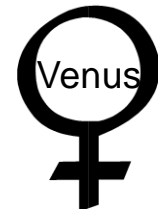# Are teachers and testers on different assessment planets?

University of Bedfordshire

Mars
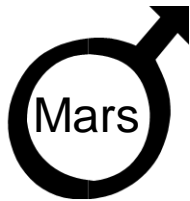
The science of standardised testing

'dehumanizing and oppressive pseudo-assessments'
(van Lier 2004)

The art of classroom-based assessment

Lacking in reliability and validity (Clapham 2000)

Venus

What do informal 'in-flight' in-class assessment, external proficiency tests and points between all have in common?

Asking informative questions

'Being literate in assessment… means having the capacity to ask and answer critical questions about the purpose for assessment, about the fitness of the tool being used, about testing conditions, and about what is going to happen on the basis of the results'
Inbar-Lourie (2013)

Assessment literacy for language teachers

Green 2014
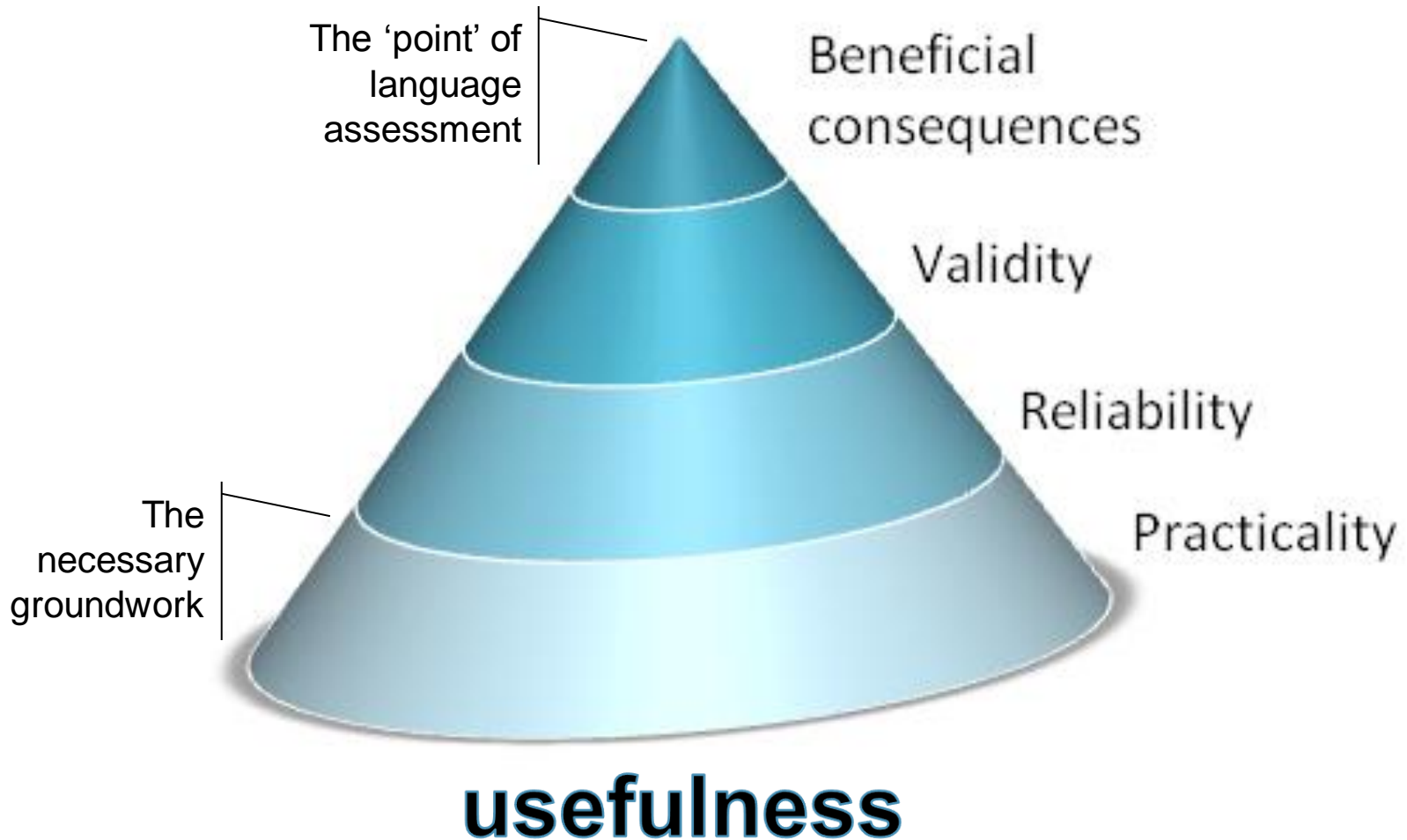Exploring Language Assessment and Testing

ProSET EU TEMPUS funded project for teacher training in Russian Federation
Proset-tempus.net
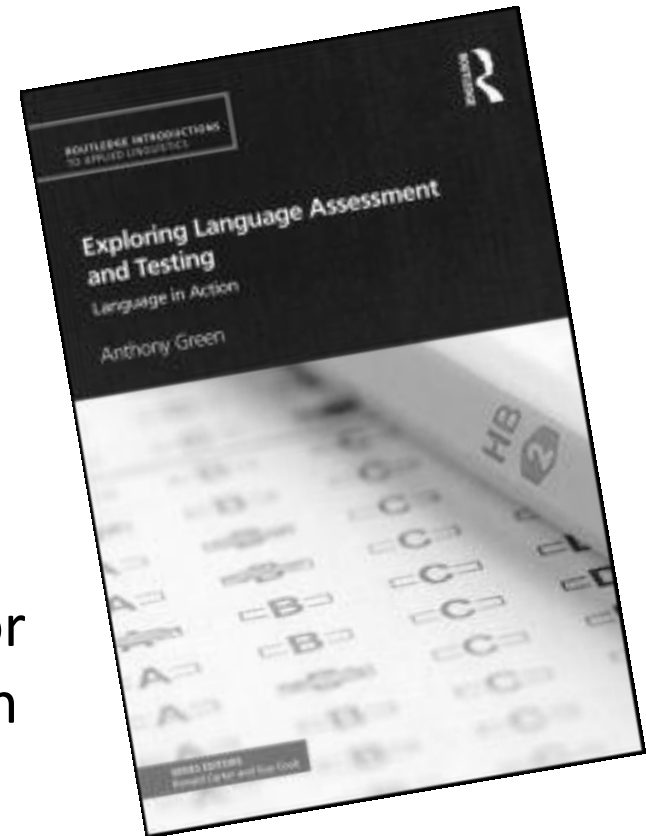
Assessment literacy for teachers and test developers:
A common agenda for teachers and testing professionals?

QUALITY
&
PRICE

Assessment qualities

The 'point' of language assessment

Beneficial consequences

Validity

Reliability

The necessary groundwork

Practicality

usefulness

Effective assessment comes at a PRICE
(Green 2013)

Planning and

Reflection lead to

Improvement, when supported by

Co-operation and informed by

Evidence

University of Bedfordshire

Planning

Planning should always be built into the development of any new project - and assessments are no exception. The more thorough the plans, the better the assessment is likely to be.

Planning needed for P-R-V-BC

Key resources: time and training

Reflection

Reflection and review are fundamental to good quality systems. The effectiveness of planned and current materials and practices in fulfilling their purpose should constantly be questioned and evaluated.

How can P-R-V-BC be improved?

Key resources: assessment cycle

Improvement

Improvement on current materials and practices is always possible and should be the constant aim of any assessment system. Reflection is directed towards making improvements.

Key resources: iterative, evolutionary approach to development, systems for validation/ evaluation

Cooperation

Cooperation and teamwork are essential to the development of good assessment materials and practices. Shared ideas and shared criticisms aid reflection and inform improvement.

Key resources: programmed opportunities for cooperation between teachers, supportive environment.

Evidence

Evidence is the basis for good decision-making. Reflection based on good evidence is much more constructive than prejudiced guesswork as a means of improving quality.

Key resource: record keeping

Effective record-keeping helps everyone involved to understand where procedures and materials could be made better.

Systematic analysis informs effective improvement.